



# UPDATE

## Newsletter of the N.Y. African Burial Ground Project

*Funds provided by the U.S. General Services Administration*

Winter Edition 2003 •

• Volume 3, Issue 8

### African Burial Ground Project Celebrates Black History Month 365 Days A Year!!!

#### Dear Update Readers:

The New Year 2003 began for the Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI) with a deluge of requests for OPEI services for Black History Month. We all still live with the post-traumatic effects of the attack on the World Trade Center. We do, however, realize that it is both a blessing and an opportunity to get back to the business of providing information and educational services on the national landmark 18th-century NY African Burial Ground.

The OPEI has commitments to provide more than 45 educational services consisting of landmark African Burial Ground tours, slide presentations, film showings and hosting information booths for a diversity of audiences, organizations, schools, churches and government agencies.

Beginning in the first week of February, the OPEI will also begin providing unscheduled tours for members of the public in the lobby of 290 Broadway (see page 1 photo). The OPEI Public Education staff will also distribute African Burial Ground educational materials from this information desk daily. This new post at the historic site will allow tourists, individuals and other small groups access to the educational services and informational expertise of the OPEI without making appointments to visit the OPEI offices at 201 Varick Street.

The OPEI staff is working to reopen the "David Ruggles Reading Room" in early March 2003. The reading room will function as a public archive on the African Burial Ground and the 17th-through-19th-century African presence in New York. The holdings are specifically focused on the lives and accomplishments of the Africans enslaved in early New York, and on their struggle for free-



**OPEI Public Educators and Director at the new OPEI information desk in 290 Broadway. l. to r.: Claude Massiah, Andrea Rogers, Nonet Dapul, Dr. Wilson, Shaniqua Maxwell-Singleton and Dorian Harrington**

Photo credit: Charris Walker

dom. This focus directly parallels the known period of use for this burial ground.

Carter G. Woodson started the celebration of Black History week in 1926 to highlight the achievements of African-Americans to the building of America. Woodson's mission was to inform America of the contributions made by people of African descent, collectively and individually. Today this celebration extends through the month of February throughout the United States.

At the NY African Burial Ground we are entrusted with the mission of educating the world about the neglected history of Africans who lived and died, enslaved and free, building this great city that is New York.

As always, may the ancestors guide us....

Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D., Editor-In-Chief

**"I'm for truth no matter who tells it, I'm for justice no matter who it is for or against, I'm a human being first and foremost, and as such I'm for whoever and whatever benefits humanity." --Malcolm X**

*Update*, the newsletter of the African Burial Ground Project, is published by the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground Project (OPEI). Inquiries about the Project may be sent to 201 Varick Street, New York, NY 10014. Our telephone number is (212) 337-2001. To fax inquiries call (212) 337-1447. Please send e-mail inquiries to [nyabg@att.net](mailto:nyabg@att.net).

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*and more!*

## Letters to the Editor

### Continuing the 9/11 Dialogue

Thank you for your copies of *Update*. In the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, I am thankful your staff did not sustain casualties in light of the destruction of the OPEI offices at the World Trade Center. Best wishes in continuing your important work and research with the African Burial Ground.

Patricia K. McGee  
Member of the N.Y. Senate

Your open letter to the OPEI public says it all. I say you're the soul of New York City/ABG-OPEI, your strength, dedication and fortitude shines all around you, in your work, writings and within your staff and wonderful volunteers. A case in point is Brother Peter Cole, what a treasure. You and *Update* alighted my candle to the NYC/ABG-OPEI in 1993 and it is my intention to pass the light on to my family and as many others as I can.

Mosi O. Paki  
Youngstown, Ohio

Just wanted to send my condolences as well as congratulations that all staff and volunteers made it through that dark day a year ago. Saddened by the news, my first thoughts focused on the Winter Garden as well as your offices, being my two favorite places in the towers. How relieved I was to get the latest newsletter. It was like a phoenix rising from the ashes. Thrilled to hear none of the actual remains were on site, and of the artifacts that were there, many have been recovered. This is a sign from the ancestors that they are watching over us and their spirits refuse to be forgotten.

The task ahead to restore the paper, print and film archives will be some work but it's all a labor of love that has sustained the Project from the moment the very first piece of evidence was discovered as if they have "called out from history."

*Continued next page*

## Letters to the Editor (cont.)

My condolences and congratulations to all who have worked and will continue to toil on this valuable piece of New York City's history as well as the history of the United States of America. Long live the African Burial Ground Project!

Marion Jones  
New York, NY

I recently read the article in The Amsterdam News entitled "African Burial Ground recovers after 9/11." [Spring/Summer 2002] I was very happy to read there were no injuries or death of any OPEI staff. Prior to 9/11 I was on your mailing list and would like to be put back on.

I have also been to the African Burial Ground at Broadway and Duane Street. Thank you for keeping it so beautiful and still continuing to provide excellent information. It is very important for African-Americans to know their history. I am proud of you and your staff. God Bless You. Peace and Blessings,

Ann Cheatham  
Queens Village, NY

### Acknowledging OPEI Public Educators

I am writing to thank Mr. Massiah and your organization (OPEI) for the tour that was presented to my class on August 10, 2002. The tour proved to be very educational and Mr. Massiah was very informative. Without a doubt the class did not want to leave and I found it hard to tell them it was time to go. Mr. Massiah did a great job and I want to convey that to you. Although we were not able to view the film that day, Mr. Massiah made it available to the class. I am looking forward to working with your organization and Mr. Massiah in the future. On behalf of the College of New Rochelle I would like to thank Mr. Massiah and your organization.

Johnnie Richardson  
College of New Rochelle  
South Bronx Campus  
Bronx, NY

Thank you for arranging your schedule to come to our Stuyvesant Seniors Group. It was an informative and

exciting presentation. We learned many things which we had not known. Thank you for an interesting afternoon.

Beverly Spielvogel, Coordinator  
Stuyvesant Seniors Group  
Epiphany Library  
New York, NY

***OPEI would like to extend thanks to the following individuals for their assistance in the aftermath of 9/11:***

■ ***A special thank you to Dr. Martia Goodson for providing a meeting space.***



The following individuals and institutions donated books to help OPEI rebuild its library. The books will be available in our reading room:

- Mario Armando Maldonado donated the book, *African Art*, by Duncan Clarke.
- Randall Gabrielan, from Monmouth County, New Jersey Historical Society, has generously donated two critical publications for the study of slavery in the North: *Black Birth Book of Monmouth County, New Jersey 1804-1848* and the *Manumission Book of Monmouth County New Jersey*.
- Edward Bell, Senior Archaeologist at the Massachusetts Historical Commission, provided several valuable archaeological studies.
- Edward Bell, Senior Archaeologist at the Massachusetts Historical Commission, provided several valuable archaeological studies.
- Cynthia Copeland, former OPEI Public Educator and current Education Curator at the New York Historical Society, contributed the *Encyclopedia of New York City History*, a valuable asset for the Project.

**OPEI welcomes letters from its readers  
but reserves the right to edit  
for length and clarity**





## AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND UPDATE



■ **African Burial Ground Commemorative Stamp Campaign Continues.** After being rejected by the U.S. Postal Service, African Burial Ground advocates, which include the OPEI Volunteers and Friends of the African Burial Ground, have reignited the African Burial Ground Commemorative Stamp campaign for the issuance of a stamp series depicting the lives of early New York Africans.

Located in lower Manhattan, the New York African Burial Ground contains the remains of over 20,000 Africans who were banned by New York City law from being buried within New York City limits in the 1700s. The site underscores the neglected history of slavery and the contributions made by New York Africans to building early America. Since its rediscovery in 1991 during the construction of the federal office building located at 290 Broadway, the African Burial Ground has been recognized as the country's most significant colonial burial ground and one of the most important archaeological finds of the century.

Initiated in 1994 (see Update Vol. 2, No.11 for stamp campaign highlights), by retired postal employee **Richard Brown, who was also a member of the African Burial Ground Federal Steering Committee** convened by the U.S. Congress to recommend plans for the African Burial Ground, signatures in support of the Commemorative Stamp Series were collected from 50 states, 42 countries and from elected officials nationwide. On February 11, 2000, 160,000 signatures were submitted to the United States Postal Service, whose Citizen Stamp Advisory Committee has twice rejected the proposal.

In a letter to the Postmaster General (see Update Vol. 3, No. 1), Dr. Wilson points out, "The volunteers envision a stamp series that would depict the lives of these early New York Africans and African-American[s].... In the past we have seen stamps honoring the heritage of Irish-Americans whose ancestors emigrated from Ireland; we have seen the Holocaust survivors rescued



**Jake Richardson, former Building Manager at 290 Broadway, and Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson at the African Burial Ground.**  
Photo credit: Charris Walker

by allied troops honored; however, to date there has never been a series of stamps recognizing the lives of the twelve million Africans [directly] affected by slavery. Honoring the National Historic Landmark New York African Burial Ground would serve as a symbol to recognize all enslaved people of African descent."

For more information, contact the OPEI Volunteers at 212-337-2001 or via e-mail at [volunteers.NYABG@.att.net](mailto:volunteers.NYABG@.att.net).

■ **Jake Richardson**, the former building manager for 290 Broadway, the location of the African Burial Ground site, has been promoted to manage other GSA Manhattan sites. The OPEI extends its appreciation and best wishes for success in his new role. He will be missed.

■ **On September 15, 2002, Deadria Farmer**, a graduate of the New England School of Law, filed a New York Class Action Complaint (Complaint) arguing for reparations "on behalf of herself and all other persons similarly situated." New York's African Burial Ground plays a pivotal role in the Complaint because it provides irrefutable evidence of the exploitive nature of slavery. Analysis of the human remains recovered from the site confirms the physical

*Continued next page*

## *African Burial Ground Update (cont.)*

hardship which developed from the hard labor needed to build and sustain the early infrastructure of New York City. Deadria first visited the site in 1991, and by August of 1992, had elected to serve as one of several organizers for the African Interfaith Ceremony and 24-hour drum vigil. "Over 8,000,000 Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the United States from 1619-1865," she stated. The practice of slavery constituted an immoral and inhumane deprivation of African life, liberty and African citizenship rights, culture and heritage, and it further deprived them of the fruits of their own labor."

Targeted companies in the Complaint include the Aetna Life Insurance Company, which routinely wrote policies enabling enslavers to recoup financial loss if their "human property" ran away or was killed or maimed as a result of work-related factors. Aetna offered a public apology in March of 2000. In contrast, Fleet Boston Financial Corporation has declined to discuss the issue or acknowledge any wrongdoing. However, the Complaint cites historic records outlining Fleet's financial support of John Brown of Rhode Island. Brown routinely sent ships to Africa to purchase human cargo for sale in the Americas. Brown University was later founded by his wealthy descendants.

Newspapers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century also played a special role in northern slavery, advertising the origins, ship arrivals and sale of countless African men, women and children. One surviving newspaper of that period, *The Hartford Courant*, has also apologized for its past advertising policies. An unknown percentage of these individuals were likely to have been buried in the African Burial Ground.

Along with public apologies, Deadria has called for a portion of the profits made by targeted companies to be set aside in a trust fund for the descendants of enslaved Africans. The response has been less than favorable. Her critics complain that too much time has elapsed for reparations to be considered a valid claim. In response, Deadria reminds them that the first petition for reparations was brought before the U.S. Senate in 1898.



**Panelists from Fall Symposium: (l to r) Dr. Martia Goodson, Cynthia Copeland, Chris Moore, Ayo Harrington & Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson.**

Photo Credit: Andrea Rogers

■ **Kudos to Black New Yorkers!** The OPEI's Fall Symposium, the first since September 11, 2001, was held November 16, 2002, at the African Burial Ground site. "Remembering Black New Yorkers" was the theme of this informative event attended by an array of students, parents, professional educators and members of the public interested in the "where and how" of conducting research on the early New York African presence. OPEI volunteer Gene Peters, President of P.R.I.S.M., presented an exhibit of artifacts from the African enslavement trade in America (see pages 8-9 for article and photos).

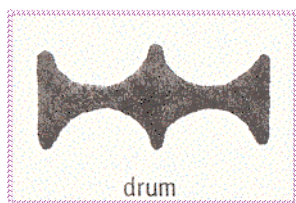
The presentation of the 2000 released, Eric V. Tait Productions documentary film: "Then I'll be Free to Travel Home" (Part I), initiated this informative event. The film highlights the politics of the African Burial Ground and was followed by a question and answer session with the producer, Eric V. Tait.

The symposium continued with panel discussions that focused on the existing resources and archival institutions that may be accessed for historic research. Attendees learned how artifacts, photographs and other primary and secondary resources might be found in these collections. Panelists sharing a plethora of vital information included: Cynthia Copeland, Education Curator, New York Historical Society; Christopher Moore, Research Coordinator, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; Dr. Martia Goodson, Historian, Baruch College and OPEI's Director; Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson, who provided an update on the status of the archival recovery of the OPEI files and data. She also announced the anticipated reopening of the OPEI Reading Room scheduled for March 2003. A poem in memory of the late Sonny Carson, community activist, was presented by OPEI volunteer Wajeedah Anderson-Beyah.

Ayo Harrington, educational advocate, concluded the panel discussion by announcing a resurgent effort to petition the U.S. Postal Service for the issuance of an African Burial Ground Commemorative Stamp (see page 4).



# OPEI 2003 SATURDAY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

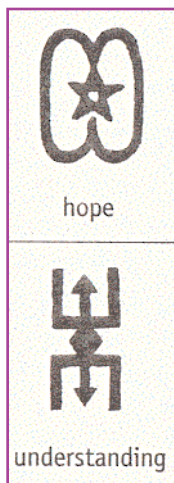


January 18, 2003 – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.  
Volunteer Training  
201 Varick Street, Room 1021

February 15, 2003 – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.  
African Burial Ground Film Festival  
290 Broadway, 30th floor

March 22, 2003 – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.  
Annual Youth Symposium  
290 Broadway, 30th floor

April 19, 2003 – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.  
Volunteer Training  
201 Varick Street, Room 1021



May 17, 2003 –  
12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.  
Spring Educators  
Symposium  
290 Broadway, 30th floor

June 21, 2003 –  
12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.  
African Burial Ground  
Film Festival and the  
Announcement of Student  
Writing Competition  
Winners  
290 Broadway, 30th floor

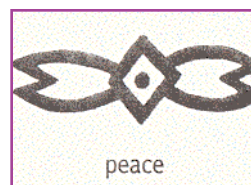
July 19, 2003 – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.  
OPEI Open to the Public  
201 Varick Street, Room 1021

August 16, 2003 – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.  
OPEI Open to the Public  
201 Varick Street, Room 1021

September 20, 2003 – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.  
African Burial Ground Film Festival  
290 Broadway, 30th floor

October 25, 2003 – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.  
Volunteer Training  
201 Varick Street, Room 1021  
*“National Make A Difference Day”*

November 22, 2003 – 12:00 – 4:00 p.m.  
Fall Educators Symposium  
290 Broadway, 30th floor



December 27, 2003 – 12:00 noon – 3:00 p.m.  
Annual Kwanzaa Celebration  
290 Broadway, 30th floor

**All events are free and will be held in  
government buildings. Space is limited, so please  
reserve early. Call 212-337-2001  
for information and  
reservations.**



## ***The Henrietta Marie: An OPEI Staff Report***



**OPEI's Public Educators recently visited the *Henrietta Marie* exhibit at Federal Hall, New York City, for more insight on the lives of Africans in the 1700s.**

The exhibit of the *Henrietta Marie*, recently on display at the African-American Museum in Hempstead, L.I., October 27, 2002 - January 12, 2003, provided a reminder of slavery's contributions to the world's wealth. Similar to New York's landmark African Burial Ground, the *Henrietta Marie* offers compelling evidence of the past. In the year 1700, shortly after stopping to sell 190 African captives in Jamaica, West Indies, the ship sank approximately thirty-five miles west of Key West, Florida. Recovered items included more than eighty sets of shackles, Venetian glass trade beads, ivory, and a cast bronze bell bearing the ship's name.

These artifacts, rescued by a team of divers, may represent the largest known collection documenting 17th-century slavery. "Like the African Burial Ground, the discovery of the *Henrietta Marie* is a visible reminder of enslavement," Public Educator Claude Massiah observed. "It's as if the bones and the artifacts refuse to stay buried any longer." [For a detailed discussion of the African Burial Ground artifacts see *Update* Vol. 2, No. 2].

Shaniqua Maxwell-Singleton, a Public Educator and Media Coordinator at the African Burial Ground Project, noted that the exhibit depicted European captors who fueled regional wars amongst various African nations to maintain a supply of captives. "Africans who participated in these wars had no way of knowing that slavery was much harsher in the Americas."

Asked how the *Henrietta Marie* exhibit might contribute to our public education efforts, Shaniqua responded: "It allows us to see what the Middle Passage was like, an 1,800 to 3,000-mile journey between Africa and the Americas. The exhibit also emphasizes how African culture and customs were not lost, as some would have you believe. It still exists in language, music, food, religion, clothing and folk tales." Claude concluded: "The Public Educator is the voice that enlightens and reminds the public of these untold numbers of Africans and their God-like ability to not only survive and endure, but to outlast the most inhumane institution ever visited on a people. The fact that Africans and their descendants are alive and well today is testimony to their indomitable spirit."



## **Web Watch**

**Learn more about the *Henrietta Marie* at <http://www.melfisher.com/henriettamarie>**

### **Seneca Village Online:**

**Explore the historical background of this diverse community of African-American, Irish and German inhabitants established in 1825 near 81st Street and York Avenue. The village was destroyed in 1857 with the development of Central Park. <http://projects.ilt.columbia.edu/>**

### **Black Facts Online:**

**A database offering a wealth of African-American history. <http://www.blackfacts.com/>**

**The Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History ensures that the accomplishments of this historic community is remembered through annual celebration and fundraising events. Free African-Americans settled Weeksville in 1838. Log on to learn more about this historic place. [http://www.loc.gov/bicentennial/propage/NY/ny-10\\_h\\_towns1.html](http://www.loc.gov/bicentennial/propage/NY/ny-10_h_towns1.html)**

## OPEI VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR:

Eugene Alexander Peters  
by Donna Harden-Cole

Eugene Alexander Peters joined the OPEI Volunteer Program in 1996. Also known as Gene, he hails from Queens, New York, where he attended public school as a youngster. He was accepted to study at Buffalo State University and received an undergraduate degree in criminal justice with a minor in African-American studies. Gene continued his education at Buffalo State to earn a master's degree in student personnel administration. He has also done some post-graduate degree work in sociology at SUNY Stony Brook. Currently he works as the Assistant Director of the Education Opportunity Program at the State University of New York (SUNY) Farmingdale. Gene has also worked in the corporate arena in the field of insurance. He is also a former probation officer and formerly associated with the New York Urban League, where he developed several youth programs.

Gene was inspired to become a volunteer by the many news reports on the recovery of the historic landmark. Coupled with the outstanding public outcry, especially with regards to reports about how the remains were being mishandled, Gene's interest was piqued. Upon further scrutiny, he found it disheartening that the leadership at the time appeared to be disinterested in the importance of investigating the recovery of the remains and what this could mean to the public at large.



Eugene Peters, 2002 Volunteer of the Year (r), is congratulated by Donna Harden-Cole, OPEI Volunteer Coordinator (l).

Photo Credit: Charris Walker

The news about the GSA establishing the Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI) symbolized a beacon of hope for Gene. When he heard about the volunteer program at OPEI, he believed this would be a great opportunity to become more involved with the Project and to better himself as a person. He added that this association would only broaden his knowledge on the subject of enslaved Africans in America. With the creation of his educational company P.R.I.S.M., ("Preserving our Resources with the Intent to Share among the Many") he has obtained a variety of artifacts from the 17th and 18th centuries i.e., manumission papers, shackles, neck restraints, wills, auction documents, runaway advertisements and much more. The P.R.I.S.M. exhibit was well received at the recent OPEI 2002 Fall Symposium ( see page 5).

Gene notes, "I am extremely humbled by this award. To be honored by an organization and people whom you admire and respect, for doing something that within your heart-of-hearts you know '*you have to*' and you enjoy! Such recognition was truly a surprise."

*Continued next page*





**Above artifacts and images from P.R.I.S.M. exhibit at OPEI 2002 Fall Symposium. Right: P.R.I.S.M. staff: Ellen Cox, Director and Donna Jones, Genealogist pose with historic image.**  
Photo credit: Dorian Harringt



Gene has volunteered on various levels at the many OPEI events since becoming a volunteer in 1996. He has assisted with the setup/cleanup for events, materials distribution. He has acted as a building guide for visitors, as well as a photographer. He wants to encourage anyone who is looking for a volunteer opportunity to come and join the volunteers at the OPEI.

Gene finds it rewarding to be associated with an organization that allows him to give something back to the community by sharing this information with his students at SUNY-Farmingdale. Gene also distributes African Burial Ground materials when he conducts P.R.I.S.M. historic lectures and exhibitions.

Gene would like to see the OPEI continue with its efforts of making this historic information available to everyone. He wants this to happen not only on a local or community level, but nationally and internationally as well. He points out that all people can benefit from the research. The historic information generated from

the Project can act as a flagship for other states and regions to initiate their own research. "I accept this award with the full acknowledgment that I have been blessed by God to be able to work and advocate on behalf of the ancestors. I am fortunate to have found others with the same mission and passion, and 'I pledge' to continue. With the grace of God, and the continued support and encouragement of Dr. Wilson, Ms. Donna Harden-Cole and the entire ABG/OPEI staff and volunteer base, let us all continue to advocate for our ancestors...for they will be proud," Gene notes upon his acceptance of the award.

Gene has been a wonderful asset to the OPEI. He is the kind of volunteer any organization would hope to attract. The OPEI applauds Gene in his volunteer efforts and wishes him all the best in his many worthwhile endeavors. He is available to do historic presentations as well as exhibit the artifacts in his collection. He can be reached at **P.R.I.S.M. Educational Resources at 631-842-9549.**



## Community Voices

Compiled by Donna Harden-Cole

**The notion of providing financial compensation (reparations) to African descended people for the work and contributions made by their ancestors who were enslaved in colonial and early America is a heated subject of debate these days. In his recent visit to the NY African Burial Ground, Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. referred to the landmark African Burial Ground as a “Ground Zero,” a symbol of the debt that America owes to the descendants of enslaved people.**

**Question: How do you see the African Burial Ground in relation to reparations?**

**Christopher Moore  
Research Coordinator  
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture  
New York, New York**

To tally the dollar value of the contributions of the people buried in the African Burial Ground would be an exciting project. Rarely commented upon by historians, but common in the first three centuries of the slavery era (1500-1800) was the use of slaves as colony builders: clearing shorelines for shipping, draining swamps, removing trees for farms, and building roads and fortifications for new colonies – which is precisely how enslaved labor was used in early New York. In all five boroughs, the enslaved Africans were the city’s first municipal labor force.

The history of New York and its African cemetery provides, literally, a clear and direct report on the manner by which slave labor was used to build and support the

economies of colonization across two continents. New York City loves to boast that it is the greatest city in the world – then how much would it cost to build it? — and the thousands of cities and towns for which the slaves labored to create – from Albany to Argentina?

**L. N’Zinga Strickland  
Freelance Journalist  
Brooklyn, New York**

I would agree with Reverend Jackson on the point that the African Burial Ground is a symbol of debt. According to anthropologists like Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson, history shows that enslaved New Yorkers during colonial times worked in every aspect of commerce in building this state. Their forced slavery enlisted them to work on the docks, clear land, do field work, slave in the ‘master’s’ household and many other unbearable tasks.

From analytical studies on the bones themselves over the years, Dr. Michael L. Blakey, as scientific director, reported that from deformities of muscles in skeletons, injuries sustained and the findings of malnutrition, these people were literally “worked to death.” And as a result of this purgatory in New York and other states, America is now considered the wealthiest nation on earth. The dead found in the African Burial Ground are a glowing example of a pattern of African peoples throughout the country, and indeed the world, who built existing economies with a lash to their backs. No doubt, those made rich on black captivity and blood owe us restitution.

**Dr. Martia Goodson  
Historian  
Baruch College/CUNY  
New York, New York**

Calculating the debt owed for repair of damages to enslaved Africans buried in the New York African Burial Ground (NYABG), we see enormous damage and enormous debt. First, the burials evidence a Transatlantic Slave Trade: 50-100 million Africans uprooted from their homelands and thousands forcibly

*Continued next page*

## ***Community Voices (cont.)***

brought to New York and enslaved here, where they struggled to survive while their labor and lives were exploited. Second, the estimated 20,000 burials in less than 90 years indicate harsh living conditions for the enslaved.

The remains tell us many things: there were no old people buried there; everyone died young; over 40% of burials are of young enslaved Africans; the study of bones indicates overwork, malnutrition and disease; malformations of children's skulls indicate poor diet leading to mental retardation and a more diminished quality of life.

Reparations are made in order to honor both the memory of the enslaved Africans buried at the NYABG and the communities of descendants of those buried in lower Manhattan, at the African Burial Ground Zero.

**Imam Dr. Muhammad Hatim**  
**General Secretary**  
**Admiral Family Circle Islamic Community**  
**New York, New York**

The subject of reparations puts the American People of African descent in a reflective mind set. It causes them to reflect on the issues, related to them, that are outstanding within the American society. These issues include the outstanding moral and legal debts in America's "damage accounts" for which final payment, and closure are needed. With closure, America can begin a much needed healing process. Reparations is a significant part of that healing process.

The African Burial Ground contains the physical and material evidence of the atrocities of enslavement. The "moral charges" for these atrocities begin with genocide, cultural/religious devastation. Potential "legal charges" may include, among others, 1) kidnapping, 2) aiding and abetting, and 3) theft of labor. The defendants in these charges are 1) businesses and corporations that directly benefitted from enslavement, 2) descendants of individuals who are still benefitting from the atrocities, and 3) the government which passed egregious legislation facilitating the "peculiar institution" of enslavement.

**William Loren Katz**  
**Author**  
**New York, New York**

The African Burial Ground's relationship to the issue of reparations is similar to the relationship the historic burial site bears to the New York financial district that rises majestically on its ruins. The overworked and exploited African bodies, particularly of the young, that lie in such great numbers beneath the financial district symbolically attest to the largest sources of appropriated wealth and exploited human beings that undergird the creation and success of this city and country.

During Dutch colonization enslaved Africans built Wall Street. Then, the wealth gathered from the sale and use of the African labor represented by this burial site both became and symbolized the most significant, reliable and valuable source of wealth for those who imposed their rule in the name of Dutch, English and the United States government.



**DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS  
ABOUT THE  
AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND PROJECT?**

**Please send inquiries  
to our  
e-mail address:**

***nyabg@worldnet.att.net***



## **GSA Announces Significant Progress With New York African Burial Ground Project Howard University Conducting Scientific Work, Reinterment Expected This Year**

### **NEW YORK CITY (February 26, 2003)**

- The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) today announced significant progress toward completion of the culturally and historically significant African Burial Ground project in lower Manhattan.

“In keeping with President Bush’s direction, we are applying renewed leadership and priority to the African Burial Ground Project, and the results we are achieving will lead us to the successful completion of this highly important project,” said GSA Administrator Stephen A. Perry. “We are definitely focused on completing the African Burial Ground Project prudently, expeditiously, and with dignity.”

The African Burial Ground was uncovered in 1991 during construction of a federal office building at Broadway and Duane Street. At the site – since designated a National Historic Landmark – archaeologists exhumed 408 remains and scores of artifacts for study, which will be reinterred once scientific work is completed. “We have been

working diligently to re-engage the parties who are working together to complete this project successfully,” said Regional Administrator Karl H. Reichelt, who is leading the project as head of GSA’s Northeast & Caribbean Region headquartered in New York. “GSA is now poised for the first time in a decade to complete the scientific work, conduct reinterment, construct a memorial, and develop an educational center befitting the site and the city. These are accomplishments long overdue, but when completed will live on in cultural and historic importance for generations.”

Central to GSA’s recent progress is a new agreement reached with Howard University to complete scientific analysis of African Burial Ground (ABG) artifacts and remains. Howard University and its research team will prepare three main reports based on research conducted at its campus in Washington, DC. A completion schedule calls for preliminary history and bio-anthropological reports by May, and a preliminary archaeological report by August. A final archaeology report is due in 2004.

The expected completion of these reports allows GSA to schedule the reinterment of remains and burial artifacts in the second half of 2003. Reinterment has been pending for several years while scientific reports were completed.

“I am pleased we have reached an agreement to complete the remaining research on the African Burial Ground Project and to prepare the scientific reports. Arguably, the New York African Burial Ground ranks among the most important bio-archaeological sites uncovered during the 20th century. This project is truly significant because through its findings we will gain insights into the lives of Africans and people of African descent who were inhabitants of New York City during the 17th and 18th centuries,” said Howard University President H. Patrick Swygert.

“Howard University and its research collaborators recognize that we must move forward respectfully and expeditiously to complete this important project in order that reinterment may occur at the earliest feasible date—and this is

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our goal. I acknowledge the support and cooperation of GSA Administrator Perry, Regional Administrator Reichelt and their GSA colleagues in facilitating approval of the contract. With continued cooperation, collegiality and professionalism on the part both of GSA's representatives and the University's research team, I am confident that the African Burial Ground Project will be completed successfully and on schedule."

GSA acknowledged U.S. Rep. Charles B. Rangel of New York for providing ongoing assistance and support to the ABG Project. "Congressman Rangel has been exceptionally helpful to us, and we are grateful we can rely on him for guidance going forward," Reichelt said.

**GSA is pleased to further announce the following additional accomplishments:**

- ▶ Increased efforts to inform, advise and engage public, descendant community, elected officials, contractors and other stakeholders important to the ABG.

- ▶ Reinterment expected in 2003. Ceremony planning underway.

- ▶ Moving forward on design and eventual construction of

exterior memorial.

- ▶ Established working partnership with Department of Interior, National Park Service (NPS) to develop an interpretive center adjacent to the burial ground. GSA has learned of broad support for the future of the site as a National Park.

- ▶ Hired the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) as technical advisors.

- ▶ Recovered burial artifacts stored within 6 World Trade Center.

**GSA Increases Outreach and Education**

GSA has increased its efforts to inform, advise and engage the public, members of the descendant community, elected officials, project contractors and other stakeholders important to the current and future state of ABG.

GSA and the Army Corps team have engaged and communicated with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) and the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (NYCLPC). The completion of the scientific reports, the construction of the site memorial and the development of an interpretive center are obliga-

tions contained within a 1991 Memorandum of Agreement with GSA, the NYCLPC and the ACHP. "The Council is encouraged by GSA's recent progress and is hopeful that with collaboration among the stakeholders, GSA will meet its milestones," said Charlene Vaughn, Assistant Director for Federal Program Development at the ACHP.

GSA continues to fully fund a public education outreach program through the Office of Public Education & Interpretation (OPEI). OPEI provides information about the archaeological, cultural, historical and physical aspects of the site and its contents. It publishes a quarterly newsletter that tracks developments on the scientific research, the interpretive center and the exterior memorial. This international newsletter has a distribution of more than 15,000. OPEI's public educators have provided approximately 12,000 tours, as well as slide presentations and site visits annually to schools, organizations, and the general public. OPEI also sponsors a variety of well-attended forums, film festivals and open houses. The OPEI headquarters are located at 201 Varick Street, New York City.

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## **Reinterment Plans for 2003**

GSA is in preliminary discussions with several organizations, including the New York Public Library Schomburg Center For Research in Black Culture, for the planning and coordination of a comprehensive and inclusive reinterment ceremony to be held later this year. A ceremony is anticipated that is international in scope, ecumenical, and showcases the African American experience in New York City. A two-to-three-day event is planned with a ceremony commencing at Howard University in Washington, DC, and culminating in New York City.

"I'm glad to see Administrator Perry and GSA have made the successful completion of the African Burial Ground Project a top priority. I hope these renewed efforts will give the site the historical significance it deserves," said Howard Dodson, Chief of the Schomburg Center.

## **Exterior Memorial Planned**

GSA has commenced planning of an Exterior Memorial upon the African Burial Ground site. A panel of interested parties selected the following firms and individuals as design finalists:

1. Joseph DePace, Joseph DePace Architect, New York, NY

2. Katherine Dean, Groundworks, New York, NY

3. Rodney Leon, Brooklyn, NY

4. Cheryl McKissack, McKissack & McKissack, New York, NY

5. Eustace Pilgrim, Eustace, Pilgrim & Christopher Davis, New York, NY

GSA plans a future exhibit of the five selected proposals later this year. Completion of the ABG Memorial is expected in 2004.

In the meantime, GSA is enhancing the appearance of the site. A more appropriate, temporary fence is being installed and a new sign will be erected shortly. Both will be removed when the exterior memorial is completed.

## **NPS Collaborate on Interpretive Center**

The African Burial Ground is already recognized by the National Park Service as a National Historic Landmark.

Now, GSA has established a working relationship with the National Park Service (NPS) to develop an interpretive center within the lobby of 290 Broadway, adjacent to the bur-

ial ground. NPS will consult on all aspects of the interpretive center, and reach out to the public for partnership and ideas. Many have voiced support for an eventual plan to operate the African Burial Ground as a national park. GSA will welcome public input on the future role of the National Park Service.

"The national importance of the African Burial Ground cannot be overstated," said Fran Mainella, Director of the National Park Service. "It is a National Historic Landmark, which makes its national significance equal to national parks such as the Statue of Liberty, Gettysburg, and the Grand Canyon. The African Burial Ground is a crucial story of America, one that has been forgotten too long. We are delighted to have been asked by GSA to participate in this historic undertaking. We would like to use this opportunity to listen to the community about the value and meaning of the site, how the story can be told, how we can help, and how we can form a partnership with others to keep this story alive."

A panel of GSA officials, exhibit designers, and African-American historians have selected New York-based IDI

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Construction Corp. to build the 3,000 square foot facility. An interpretive environment will be created that informs, engages, and enlightens visitors about the historical, archaeological, and cultural findings surrounding the burial ground and New York's African ancestral community. Completion is anticipated by December 2004.

### **Army Corps Hired For Technical Assistance**

GSA has retained the expert services of the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) to provide technical assistance and day-to-day project management of the African Burial Ground Project. Anthropologist Dr. Michael Trimble leads the Army Corps team.

"We are fully committed to assisting GSA and we are very encouraged about progress," said Trimble. "The African Burial Ground Project is a his-

toric, urban archaeological project that has provided the scientific and African-American communities, as well as the public, with an invaluable opportunity to better understand a little-known aspect of the history of New York City and the United States."

### **Artifacts Recovered From World Trade Center Disaster**

Thousands of artifacts were feared lost when the OPEI office and a Howard University laboratory were destroyed in 6 World Trade Center. Miraculously, the room that contained the photographs, records, and artifacts was only partially destroyed. With the help of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and City of New York agencies, GSA recovered more than 200 boxes of artifacts. While some original records were lost, nearly all of the African Burial Ground

archaeological collection was recovered. This collection will be curated in New York so that the public and scholars can continue to study the important history represented by this project. The artifacts are currently being stored at the Alexander Hamilton US Customs House in Lower Manhattan where they will be further studied as Howard University completes its scientific reports.

### **Financial Commitment**

To date, GSA has dedicated over \$22 million towards the African Burial Ground Project. From 1989 to 2000 GSA obligated \$19.6 million; from 2000 to the present GSA has obligated \$4 million, primarily for education and community outreach, and existing contractual obligations. The total GSA investment into the African Burial Ground Site is expected to reach \$26 million.

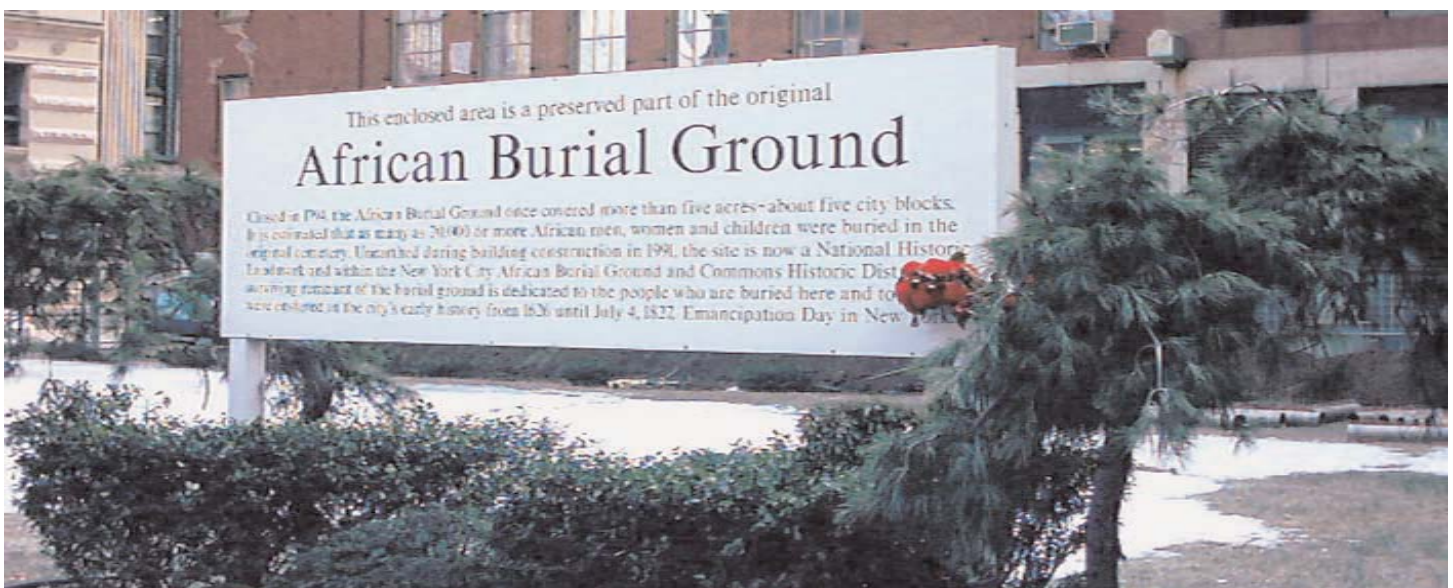


Photo credit: Charris Walker



# The African Burial Ground

## Poetry, Short Story and Essay Competition



2003

### G u i d e l i n e s

The Competition is open to students at elementary, junior high, high school and college levels.

One winner and a runner-up will be chosen from each educational level.

Winning entries will be published in *Update*:  
The Newsletter of the African Burial Ground Project.

This competition is for poetry, short stories and essays that focus on the subject of the New York African Burial Ground or the African presence in colonial New York City.

Short story and essay entries should be 1200 words or less. Poetry entries should be 150 words or less.

The evaluation of submissions will be based on clarity and original themes.

**All entries must be postmarked by March 31, 2003 and sent with an official entry form.**

**For an entry form and information package,  
please call (212) 337-2001.**

**(Please note: this is an extension to the previous  
deadline of February 28, 2003)**





### **ATTENTION EDUCATORS:**

We are currently scheduling class activities for the spring and summer semesters, 2003. To receive our free services, which include:

- ▶ Landmark ABG Site Tours
- ▶ Historical Slide Presentations
- ▶ Documentary Film Showings

please call (212) 337-2001 or send e-mail inquiries to:

*nyabg@worldnet.att.net*

### **ARE YOU ON OUR MAILING LIST?**

Please submit your name and/or corrections to  
OPEI

201 Varick Street,  
Room 1021  
New York, NY 10014  
Tel. (212) 337-2001  
Fax (212) 337-1447

### **Attention Film Buffs:**

As of March 2002, there are seven documentary films that recount, document and interpret the history, the community struggle for the preservation and the recognition of the NY African Burial Ground. You may contact the suppliers or filmmakers below for information regarding purchasing these films for your collection.

1. The Discovery Channel presents: *Unearthing the Slave Trade* (1993) (25 minutes). Contact: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, Princeton, NJ, \$149.00, plus shipping & handling Call: 609-275-1400.

2. PBS presents: *Feel It In My Bones* (25 minutes). Contact: KERA TV, Manager Video Services, Dallas, TX, \$19.95, plus shipping & handling Call: 214-740-9290.

3. Kutz Television, Inc. presents: *The African Burial Ground: An American Discovery* (1994) (a 4-part series, each part 25 minutes). Contact: The National Technical Information Services, National Audio Visual Center, Springfield, VA, \$65.00, plus shipping and handling Call: 800-553-6847, reference # AVA 19619-VNB1.

4. PBS presents the New Explorers: *Slavery's Buried Past* (1996) (60 minutes). Contact: Kurtis Productions, Chicago, IL, \$20.00, Call: 312-951-5700.

5. E.V.T. Educational Productions Inc. presents: *Then I'll Be Free to Travel Home* (175 minutes), Contact: The Cinema Guild, Inc. New York, NY, \$250.00, plus shipping & handling Call: 800-723-5522.

6. National Black Programming Consortium presents: *African Burial Ground* (60 minutes). Contact: NBPC Fulfillment Services, Columbus, OH, \$34.95, plus shipping & handling Call: 888-464-6272.

7. BBC, Meet the Ancestors Presents: *Slave Island* (2002) (55 minutes). Contact: WWW.BBCVET.COM.

Note: The Office of Public Education & Interpretation of the African Burial Ground Project does not endorse or benefit financially from the sale of any of the aforementioned films.

All OPEI services and programs are funded by the U.S. General Services Administration.



## OUR ANCESTORS

Their eyes have long  
been closed  
some with coins upon  
their lids  
and yet their voices  
spring from the  
tongues of babes

Their pained and tor-  
tured bodies  
attest to their  
strength to endure and  
to build  
“making a way out of  
no way...”

all my life I have heard  
in the old South  
that this country was  
built upon the  
backs of our fathers,  
our mothers  
sisters and brothers...

and yet I never dreamt  
that the task  
was one so painfully  
shared by  
the Africans of old  
New York.

Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D.  
1995

Photo credit: GSA

## AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND PROJECT YOUTH SYMPOSIUM

*Parents, Guardians: Please bring  
your children and join us for the  
OPEI Annual Youth Symposium!*

*Date: March 22, 2003*

*Time: 12 Noon – 4:00 pm*

*Location: 290 Broadway, 30th floor  
(adjacent to landmark  
African Burial Ground site)*

*Activities planned for the 2003 Youth  
Symposium include:*

► ***Make your own African Burial Ground  
T-Shirt***

*Just bring your own white or purple T-Shirt,  
the OPEI will supply the rest!*

► ***Baruch College Note Book Project***

*Lead by Dr. Martia Goodson, Historian.  
Meet Baruch college students as they exhibit  
their research notebooks on black history in  
New York City.*

► ***Update on the African Burial Ground  
Research***

*Come and meet the ABG scientists as they  
talk to us about what they have learned so far  
about these precious remains.*

***Reservations are required  
for all OPEI events.***

***Please call 212-337-2001 to place your  
reservations today.***

***All OPEI activities are funded by the U.S.  
General Services Administration.***

# WINTER 2003 READING LIST

Chesnutt, Charles. Frederick Douglass. NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002.

Canot, Capt. Theodore. Adventures of an African Slaver. NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002.

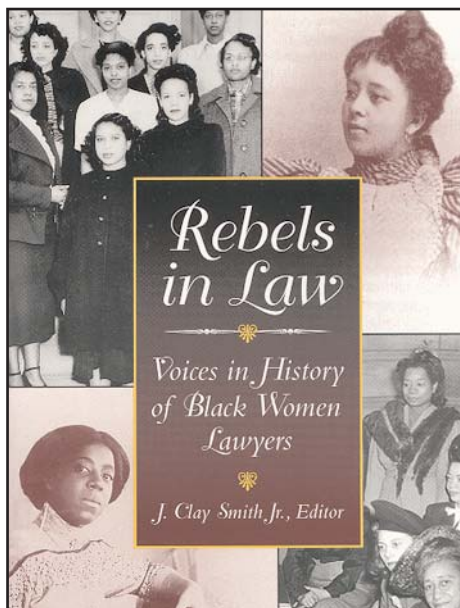
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## In the Next Issue of *Update:*

- ▶ **Media Representations**
- ▶ **Historic Preservation: Understanding Section 106**
- ▶ **The Underground Railroad**



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**ADDRESS LABEL**

